

ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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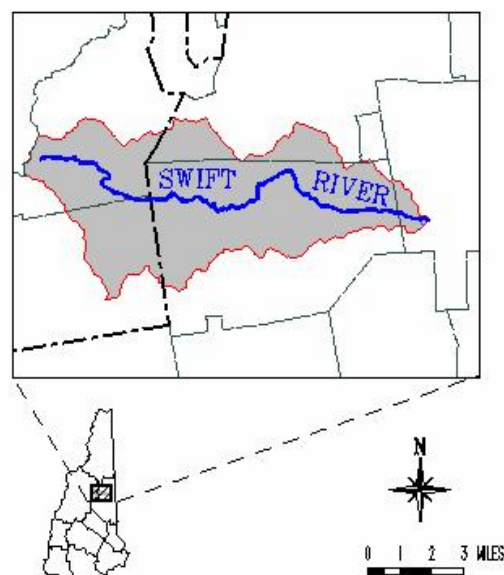
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The Swift River

The Swift River is one of the outstanding natural resources that attracts visitors to the Mt. Washington Valley. This completely free-flowing river offers spectacular views of whitewater cascades and waterfalls as it cuts a valley between mountains ranging in elevation from 2,000 to 4,000 feet in the midst of the majestic White Mountains. The Swift River's scenic location and natural resources provide opportunities for canoeing, kayaking, swimming, sightseeing, fishing, and camping for residents and visitors alike. As such, the Swift River is important to both the quality of life in the adjacent communities and the health of the regional economy.

The Swift River arises on Mt. Kancamagus in Livermore, and flows east along the Kancamagus Highway for 26 miles through the towns of Livermore, Waterville Valley and Albany before joining the Saco River in the town of Conway. Along this journey, the river drops more than 2,400 feet in elevation.



The watershed of the Swift River covers approximately 114 square miles, almost all of which is located within the White Mountain National Forest. Land use along the river and throughout the watershed is predominantly forestland providing for exceptional water quality. The Swift River watershed is part of the larger Saco River Basin which is the only major river basin in New Hampshire that is currently meeting all of the surface water quality standards of the federal Clean Water Act. The river was designated into the NH Rivers Management and Protection Program in June 1990.

History

The history of the Swift River is linked to the early settlement of the larger Saco River Basin. Early Native Americans, such as the Pigwacket kin-based group, inhabited this area. In 1642, a settlement containing 200 wigwams existed where the Swift River joins the Saco River in Conway. The Kancamagus trail ran along the Swift River and archaeological excavations have confirmed the presence of Native American activity along the terraces of the river. In the early 1800s, small farmsteads dotted the region. A fine example, the Russell-Colbath House, located near the Swift River in Albany, remains and is now owned by the U.S. Forest Service and open to the public during summer months as a museum of early American life. In 1987, the house was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Swift River is crossed by two covered bridges that were built in the mid-1800s. The Albany Bridge was restored by the U.S. Forest Service in the early 1990s. The Swift River Bridge in Conway is open only to foot traffic.

Wildlife and Plant Resources

The location of the Swift River within the White Mountain National Forest ensures the continued existence of a large, contiguous tract of forest habitat surrounding the river. One pair of the federally-listed endangered peregrine falcon has nested along the river since 1989. A 1983 U.S. Department of Agriculture Cooperative Study of the Saco River Basin listed 36 species of fish, 32 species of amphibians and reptiles, 165 species of birds, and 56 species of mammals as occurring in the various habitats of the basin. Endangered and threatened mammals and birds, such as the state-listed endangered blue-gray gnatcatcher are included in the report as well. The New Hampshire Natural Heritage Inventory has identified the presence of an exemplary natural community, the Northern New England level bog, in two locations near the river.

Fishing

The Swift River is a cold water sport fishery, supporting brook, brown and rainbow trout. The river also provides good spawning habitat for anadromous fish (fish that live in saltwater, but return to freshwater to spawn), however, seven downstream dams in Maine prevent their return to New Hampshire. An effort is underway to require fish passage facilities at those dams, thereby restoring anadromous fish runs, including Atlantic salmon, to the Swift River.



Recreational trout fishing is a popular activity on the Swift River during the warm weather months. On weekends, anglers may often be found between Rocky Gorge and the Albany-Conway town line. Due to angler demand, the natural reproductive capability of the native fish populations has been exceeded; therefore, the NH Fish and Game Department stocks the river with hatchery-reared brook and rainbow trout. The U.S. Forest Service maintains an access for handicapped anglers next to the Albany Bridge.

Recreation

The headwaters of the Swift River lie high within the White Mountains and offer outstanding views of the surrounding mountain ranges and the valley below. The river itself can be viewed at numerous points along from the Kancamagus Highway, recently declared a National Forest Scenic Byway by the U.S. Forest Service. Two of the most distinctive scenic resources on the river, Rocky Gorge and Lower Falls, are classified and managed by the U.S. Forest Service as Scenic Areas. Recreational opportunities are offered all year along the Swift River. Most of the recreational facilities along the river are managed by the U.S. Forest Service, including the Sabbaday Falls picnic area and the Passaconaway, Jigger Johnson, Blackberry Crossing, and Covered Bridge camping areas. During the winter, the river corridor attracts cross-country skiers for wilderness skiing along the Nanamocomuck Ski Trail developed by the U.S. Forest Service. Summer brings swimmers and sunbathers to Rocky Gorge and Lower Falls.

Boating

Every year, the Swift River is used by many people from throughout the Northeast for canoeing, kayaking and rafting. During spring run-off, the river provides some of the best whitewater boating in the region, with most of the river runnable from mid-April to the end of May. A six mile segment of the river below Lower Falls provides one of the most difficult, uninterrupted whitewater runs in New England. A regional boaters' guide describes the Swift River this way: "if veteran boaters were to pick five of the best whitewater rivers in New England, the Swift would surely be on everyone's list ... Although only a medium size riverbed, even by New England's standards, it boasts some of the biggest, meanest souse holes and choppiest standing waves to be found anywhere." Public access to the river is available for all of its length within the White Mountain National Forest.

For further information about the N.H. Rivers Management and Protection Program go to <http://des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/wmb/rivers/index.htm> or contact Steve Couture, Rivers Coordinator, 29 Hazen Drive, PO Box 95, Concord, NH 03302-0095; (603) 271-8801; steven.couture@des.nh.gov.